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ACTION H-01

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FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3831
INFO AMEMBASSY BEIJING
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
ASEAN COLLECTIVE
NSC WASHDC
SECDEF WASHDC
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI
DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 HANOI 002152

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV
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TAGS: PHUM PINS PGOV KIRF VM CB ETMIN HUMANR RELFREE

SUBJECT: STAFFDEL MEETING WITH ETHNIC MINORITY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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REF: HCMC 0874

1. (U) CLASSIFIED BY CHARGE DQAFFAIRES ROBERT PORTER.
REASON: 1.5 (B) AND (D).

2. (C) SUMMARY: ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS DESCRIBED TO STAFFDEL REES THE FEBRUARY/MARCH UNREST IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS, EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER THE PEOPLE SEEKING REFUGE IN CAMBODIA, NOTED GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO SOLVE ETHNIC PROBLEMS, AND DISMISSED REPORTS OF COERCIVE FAMILY PLANNING METHODS AND FORCED STERILIZATIONS. END SUMMARY.

CAUSES OF THE UNREST

3. (C) JOSEPH REES (COUNSEL TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS) AND BRIAN GUNDERSON (CHIEF OF STAFF TO HOUSE MAJORITY LEADER), ALONG WITH CONGENOFFS, MET AUGUST 13 AT CONGEN WITH SEVEN ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS FROM THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS CURRENTLY ENROLLED AT VARIOUS UNIVERSITIES IN HCMC. THE STUDENTS COMPRISED THREE MEMBERS OF THE KQHO ETHNIC GROUP FROM LAM DONG PROVINCE, TWO MEMBERS OF THE LACH ETHNIC GROUP FROM LAM DONG PROVINCE, ONE MEMBER OF THE EDE ETHNIC GROUP FROM DAK LAK PROVINCE, AND ONE MEMBER OF THE GIA RAI ETHNIC GROUP FROM GIA LAI PROVINCE. ALTHOUGH THE TWO STUDENTS FROM DAK LAK AND GIA LAI PROVINCES DID MOST OF THE TALKING, ALL THE STUDENTS CONTRIBUTED SUBSTANTIALITY TO THE CONVERSATION. (NOTE: THE STUDENT FROM DAK LAK SAID HE HAD ARRIVED IN HCMC FROM BUON ME

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THUOT ONLY THE DAY BEFORE IN ORDER TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STAFFDEL MEETING. ANOTHER STUDENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES MENTIONED THAT A PROGRAM OF THE FORD FOUNDATION WAS FUNDING HIS EDUCATION. END NOTE)

4. (C) REES BEGAN THE MEETING BY INQUIRING INTO THE CAUSES OF THE FEBRUARY/MARCH UNREST THAT TOOK PLACE IN DAK LAK AND GIA LAI PROVINCES. THE STUDENTS ALL AGREED THAT THE MAIN REASON FOR THE UNREST WERE THE ISSUES OF MIGRATION AND CLAIMS TO LAND. THEY CLAIMED THAT ETHNIC VIETNAMESE KINH MIGRANTS TO THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS OVER THE PAST DECADE HAD QAPPROPRIATEDQ THOUSANDS OF HECTARES OF LAND THAT QBELONGEDQ TO THE ETHNIC MINORITIES WHO HAVE LIVED IN THE AREA FOR GENERATIONS. ONE STUDENT EXPLAINED THAT ETHNIC MINORITY PEOPLE PRACTICE SHIFTING AGRICULTURE, CULTIVATING LAND IN ONE SECTION OF FOREST WHILE LEAVING OTHER SECTIONS FALLOW

FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS TO REJUVENATE THE SOIL. MIGRANTS TAKE LAND THAT THEY THINK IS ABANDONED OR UNOCCUPIED WHEN IN REALITY IT IS CULTIVATED LAND CURRENTLY FALLOW, HE CLAIMED.

15. (C) ONE STUDENT COMMENTED THAT WHEN THE CHILDREN OF ETHNIC MINORITY PEOPLE GET MARRIED, THEIR APPLICATION TO BUILD A HOME OR TO CULTIVATE LAND IS A COMPLEX PROCEDURE. IN CONTRAST, BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT ENCOURAGES MIGRATION FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, THE PROCEDURE FOR MIGRANTS TO BUILD AND CULTIVATE IS SIMPLIFIED, HE CLAIMED. ANOTHER STUDENT SAID THAT AS MORE MIGRANTS SETTLE IN THE AREA, THERE IS MORE CONTACT
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BETWEEN THEM AND THE MINORITIES, AND ETHNIC TENSION IS INEVITABLE. THE STUDENT SAID THE ETHNIC VIETNAMESE KINH MIGRANTS SOMETIMES DUMP THEIR GARBAGE IN MINORITY AREAS, AND THIS LEADS TO MANY QUARRELS.

16. (C) TWO OF THE STUDENTS STATED THAT JUST PRIOR TO THE DEMONSTRATIONS THAT BEGAN ON FEBRUARY 2, A NUMBER OF FIGHTS OCCURRED BETWEEN MIGRANTS AND ETHNIC MINORITY PEOPLE. ONE STUDENT SAID THAT IN PHU BO DISTRICT OF GIA LAI PROVINCE, A QUARREL BETWEEN A MIGRANT HOUSEHOLD AND A MINORITY FAMILY OVER LAND QUICKLY DEVELOPED INTO A NEIGHBORHOOD BRAWL IN WHICH SEVERAL PEOPLE USED KNIVES AND CLUBS. THE POLICE INTERVENED, ACCORDING TO THE STUDENT, BUT USED ELECTRIC PRODS AGAINST THE MINORITY PEOPLE AND APPEARED TO BE PROTECTING THE VIETNAMESE KINH. ANOTHER STUDENT SAID THAT IN CHU SE DISTRICT OF GIA LAI PROVINCE JUST A FEW DAYS BEFORE FEBRUARY 2, A FIGHT HAD BROKEN OUT BETWEEN DOZENS OF VIETNAMESE KINH MIGRANTS AND ETHNIC MINORITY PEOPLE THAT RESULTED IN MANY INJURIES SUCH AS BROKEN RIBS. (NOTE: CHU SE DISTRICT APPARENTLY REMAINS VERY TENSE. IT IS THE DISTRICT TO WHICH PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS ATTEMPTED TO KEEP AMBASSADOR PETERSON FROM TRAVELING IN JULY. SEE REFTTEL.)

BUON ME THUOT DEMONSTRATIONS AND GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

17. (C) ACCORDING TO A STUDENT FROM BUON ME THUOT, UP TO 1000 ETHNIC MINORITY PEOPLE DEMONSTRATED IN THAT TOWN IN DAK LAK PROVINCE ON FEBRUARY 3. HE SAID THE LEADERS OF THE DEMONSTRATIONS USED LOUDSPEAKERS TO VOICE THEIR DEMANDS, WHICH INCLUDED THE RETURN OF ALL CENTRAL HIGHLANDS LAND TO THE ETHNIC MINORITIES, BETTER EDUCATION FOR MINORITY PEOPLE, AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM. THE STUDENT ALSO NOTED THAT MANY DEMONSTRATORS CALLED FOR RECOGNITION OF AN INDEPENDENT DEGA STATE WITH KOK KQSOR AS ITS PRESIDENT. (NOTE: SOME MONTHS BEFORE THE DEMONSTRATIONS, KOK KQSOR, WHO LIVES IN SOUTH CAROLINA, PROCLAIMED HIMSELF PRESIDENT-IN-EXILE OF AN INDEPENDENT DEGA STATE, ENCOMPASSING ALL OF THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS. HE AND HIS CABINET-IN-EXILE REPORTEDLY PLAYED AN INSTRUMENTAL ROLE IN PLANNING THE DEMONSTRATIONS ALONG WITH ORGANIZERS RESIDENT IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS. DEGA IS A TERM USED TO DENOTE THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS AREA AND THE MINORITY PEOPLE WHO LIVE THERE. SEE REFTTEL.)

18. (C) THE SAME STUDENT SAID THE DEMONSTRATORS HAD CONGREGATED IN THE CENTER OF TOWN, BUT ARMORED MILITARY
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VEHICLES PREVENTED THEM FROM REACHING THE PEOPLEQS COMMITTEE BUILDING (TOWN HALL). HE ADDED THAT OTHER ARMORED MILITARY VEHICLES ENCIRCLED THE DEMONSTRATORS AND THAT SOLDIERS PREVENTED ADDITIONAL PEOPLE FROM JOINING THE CROWD. AT ONE POINT, A FIRE ENGINE BLASTED WATER CANONS AT THE DEMONSTRATORS. IN RESPONSE, HE ADMITTED THAT THE DEMONSTRATORS THREW STONES AT THE FIRE ENGINE AND AT THE MILITARY VEHICLES, WHILE SOME DEMONSTRATORS FOUGHT WITH POLICE. HE CLAIMED THAT THE OPERATORS OF THE FIRE ENGINE FLED UNDER A VOLLEY OF STONES. AFTER THE SITUATION CALMED, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM THE PEOPLEQS COMMITTEE CAME OUT AND MET WITH THE LEADERS OF THE DEMONSTRATORS. THE PEOPLEQS COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES PROMISED TO CONSIDER THE DEMONSTRATORSQ DEMANDS. BY THE AFTERNOON, THE DEMONSTRATORS AGREED TO GO HOME, AND THE PEOPLEQS COMMITTEE AGREED TO PROVIDE VEHICLES TO TAKE THEM HOME, ACCORDING TO THE STUDENT WHO WAS NOT AN EYEWITNESS.

19. (C) SEVERAL STUDENTS SAID THAT AFTER THE DEMONSTRATIONS OF FEBRUARY 2 IN PLEI KU IN GIA LAI PROVINCE AND FEBRUARY 3 IN BUON ME THUOT, OTHER DEMONSTRATIONS OCCURRED IN SMALLER TOWNS OF THE TWO PROVINCES IN THE SUCCEEDING WEEKS. THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT SENT IN LARGE NUMBERS OF MILITARY TROOPS TO GIA LAI PROVINCE, ACCORDING TO THESE STUDENTS. IN DAK LAK PROVINCE, TROOPS WENT ONLY TO EA SUP AND BUON DON

DISTRICTS, THEY CLAIMED. TWO STUDENTS STATED THAT THEY HAD SEEN A HELICOPTER ON DIFFERENT OCCASIONS, BUT DID NOT KNOW IF IT WAS THE SAME HELICOPTER. THEY ALSO SAID THEY SAW TANKS IN THE AREA IN FEBRUARY AND MARCH.

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THESE STUDENTS ALL STATED THAT MOST OF THE UNIFORMED SECURITY FORCES HAVE RETURNED TO THEIR BASES, BUT A FEW REMAIN. A STUDENT FROM GIA LAI PROVINCE SAID A SMALL CONTINGENT OF ABOUT 30 SOLDIERS STILL PATROLLED HIS HOME DISTRICT.

CONCERN FOR PERSONS WHO FLED TO CAMBODIA

110. (C) ONE STUDENT SAID MOST OF THE ORGANIZERS OF THE DEMONSTRATIONS HAD FLED TO CAMBODIA, BUT SOME HAD BEEN ARRESTED IN VIETNAM. HE SAID HE HEARD AN UNKNOWN NUMBER OF PEOPLE WERE DETAINED IN CAMBODIA AND TURNED OVER BY CAMBODIAN POLICE TO VIETNAMESE AUTHORITIES. ALL THE STUDENTS EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT THE PEOPLE WHO HAD FLED TO CAMBODIA AND ASKED ABOUT THEIR CURRENT SITUATION. REES TOLD THEM THAT 38 PERSONS HAD BEEN RESETTLED TO THE U.S., AND THAT ANOTHER 360 WERE UNDER UNHCR PROTECTION IN CAMBODIA. HE ADDED THAT ABOUT 70 PERSONS WHO HAD GONE TO CAMBODIA REPORTEDLY HAD RETURNED TO VIETNAM. HE SAID THAT MOST OF THE 360 STILL IN CAMBODIA HAVE STATED THEY DO NOT WANT TO GO TO THE U.S. INSTEAD, THEY WISH TO RETURN TO VIETNAM, BUT ONLY AFTER THE LAND AND MIGRATION PROBLEMS ARE SOLVED. THE STUDENTS WERE DISMAYED THAT SOME PERSONS MAY HAVE BEEN RETURNED TO VIETNAM. WHEN ASKED WHAT THEY THOUGHT BEST FOR THOSE REFUGEES STILL IN CAMBODIA, THE STUDENTS TALKED AMONG THEMSELVES AND THEN SAID THEY THOUGHT IT BEST FOR THEM TO STAY IN CAMBODIA UNDER UNHCR PROTECTION UNTIL CONDITIONS WERE SUCH THAT THEY COULD RETURN TO THEIR HOMES WITHOUT FEAR OF REPRISAL.

PROTESTANT PROBLEMS

111. (C) ALL THE STUDENTS AGREED THAT LAND AND MIGRATION WERE THE MAIN CAUSES OF THE ETHNIC UNREST. SOME OF THEM NOTED FURTHER, HOWEVER, THAT MANY ETHNIC MINORITY PEOPLE BELONG TO PROTESTANT CONGREGATIONS, AND THAT THE DEMONSTRATIONS ALSO RESULTED FROM THE VENTING OF PENT-UP FRUSTRATIONS OVER HARASSMENT OF ETHNIC MINORITY PROTESTANTS BY LOCAL OFFICIALS OVER THE YEARS.

112. (C) ONE STUDENT SAID FRIENDS HAD TOLD HIM THAT IN Krong Pa District of Gia Lai Province, authorities recently demanded several ethnic minority protestant believers renounce their faith. When they refused, they were made to pay fines (which could be in the form of money or livestock). One of the students said he had been denied a job in Plei Ku because he refused to

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CROSS OUT QTIN LANHQ (PROTESTANT) ON HIS JOB APPLICATION FORM. SEVERAL STUDENTS SAID THEY HAD HEARD THAT IN APRIL, A COFFEE SHOP OWNER IN DAM RONG VILLAGE, LAC DUONG DISTRICT IN LAM DONG PROVINCE WAS PLAYING A VIDEO OF THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST IN HER SHOP WHEN POLICE CAME AND TOLD HER TO TURN IT OFF. TEN OR TWELVE CUSTOMERS WHO WERE IN THE SHOP ARGUED WITH THE POLICEMAN WHO THEN WENT AWAY. BUT 30 MINUTES LATER, THE SHOP CAUGHT FIRE AND BURNED TO THE GROUND. THE STUDENTS CLAIMED THAT WHEN REPORTERS FROM THE DALAT CITY NEWSPAPER CAME TO THE VILLAGE INQUIRING ABOUT THE INCIDENT, THE POLICE TOLD THEM THAT THE COFFEE SHOP OWNER HAD BEEN SHOWING A PORNOGRAPHIC FILM.

113. (C) THE STUDENTS ALL AGREED THAT ETHNIC MINORITY CATHOLICS GENERALLY FARED BETTER THAN ETHNIC MINORITY PROTESTANTS IN THE HIGHLAND PROVINCES, BUT IN CERTAIN LOCALITIES CATHOLICS, TOO, FACED REPRESSION IN VARYING DEGREES. ONE STUDENT SAID HE WAS AWARE THAT IN LAC DUONG DISTRICT IN LAM DONG PROVINCE, THE PRIEST AT THE SINGLE CATHOLIC CHURCH HAS BEEN REQUESTING PERMISSION TO RENOVATE HIS BADLY DILAPIDATED CHURCH SINCE 1989, BUT HAS RECEIVED NO RESPONSE FROM THE AUTHORITIES. CATHOLICS IN THIS AREA ARE ALLOWED TO PERFORM BAPTISMS ONLY ON CHRISTMAS AND EASTER, HE SAID, BUT THIS YEAR, BECAUSE OF THE ETHNIC UNREST, EASTER BAPTISMS WERE NOT ALLOWED.

114. (C) THE STUDENTS FROM LAM DONG PROVINCE SAID IT WAS WIDELY BELIEVED THAT THE PRESTIGIOUS HIGH SCHOOL BOARDING SCHOOL FOR ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS IN THE

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PROVINCIAL CAPITAL DALAT DOES NOT APPROVE REGISTRATION FOR PROTESTANT STUDENTS. SOME OF THE STUDENTS ADDED

THAT THEY KNEW OF A 16-YEAR-OLD STUDENT AT THIS BOARDING SCHOOL WHO WAS EXPELLED IN MAY WHEN IT BECAME KNOWN THAT HIS FATHER HAD ONCE BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH FULRO. (NOTE: FULRO WAS POLITICAL/MILITARY ORGANIZATION THAT ESPOUSED AUTONOMY FOR THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS UNTIL ITS FINAL DEMISE IN THE EARLY 1990S. END NOTE.) SOME OF THE STUDENTS CLAIMED THE REASON PROTESTANTS FACE REPRESSION IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS IS BECAUSE THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES ASSOCIATE PROTESTANTISM WITH FULRO. THE STUDENTS UNANIMOUSLY DISAGREED WITH THIS VIEW. THEY AGREED THERE HAD BEEN ASSOCIATION BETWEEN PROTESTANT PASTORS AND FULRO IN THE PAST, BUT THAT NOWADAYS PROTESTANT PASTORS PREACH ONLY RELIGION. (COMMENT: SEVERAL RELIABLE PROTESTANT SOURCES HAVE PAINTED A SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT PICTURE ABOUT PROTESTANTISM AND POLITICS IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS. THEY SAY THERE IS A SPLIT BETWEEN THE MAJORITY OF PASTORS WHO WANT ONLY TO PREACH RELIGION AND A VOCAL MINORITY WHO WERE ACTIVE SUPPORTERS OF THE FORMER FULRO AND ARE NOW SUPPORTERS OF THE DEGA STATE. END COMMENT.)

GOVERNMENT ATTEMPTS TO FIND SOLUTIONS

15. (C) MOST OF THE STUDENTS SAID THEY WERE ENCOURAGED THAT THE CENTRAL AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS APPEAR TO BE SEARCHING FOR WAYS TO ADDRESS THE VARIOUS PROBLEMS OF THE ETHNIC MINORITIES. AT THE SAME TIME, A FEW OF THEM WERE DISCOURAGED THAT SOME OF THE GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS APPEARED INSINCERE. ONE STUDENT RECOUNTED THAT IN GIA LAI PROVINCE, LOCAL TELEVISION CREWS FILMED PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS DISTRIBUTING MOSQUITO NETS, BAGS OF SALT AND OTHER PROVISIONS IN A MINORITY VILLAGE, BUT WHEN THE CAMERAS WERE TURNED OFF, THE OFFICIALS REQUESTED PAYMENT FOR THE ITEMS.

16. (C) THE SEVEN STUDENTS CONCURRED THAT THE MOST SIGNIFICANT POSITIVE STEP THE CENTRAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS HAVE TAKEN IS TO STEP UP EFFORTS TO CONDUCT PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION IN MINORITY LANGUAGES. THE STUDENTS ALL AGREED THAT ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS HAVE LAGGED BEHIND EDUCATIONALLY OVER THE YEARS BECAUSE CLASSES HAVE BEEN CONDUCTED IN VIETNAMESE OR A NON-NATIVE LANGUAGE TO THEM. (NOTE: THEIR CONVERSATION WITH STAFF WAS NONETHELESS IN VIETNAMESE WITH ENGLISH INTERPRETATION. END NOTE.) THEY APPLAUDED THE GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO CONDUCT PRIMARY EDUCATION IN

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LOCAL LANGUAGES WHILE TEACHING VIETNAMESE AS A SEPARATE SUBJECT. SEVERAL STUDENTS ALSO SAID THERE HAS BEEN A CAMPAIGN SINCE FEBRUARY THAT ALL LOCAL OFFICIALS (WHO GENERALLY ARE ETHNIC VIETNAMESE KINH SENT TO ETHNIC MINORITY AREAS) SHOULD LEARN THE LANGUAGES OF THE COMMUNITIES IN WHICH THEY WORK. THIS HAS LED TO SOME JOB CREATION FOR MINORITY PEOPLE BEING HIRED AS LANGUAGE TEACHERS. IN APRIL, LAM DONG PROVINCE HIRED SEVERAL MINORITY PEOPLE TO TEACH MINORITY LANGUAGES TO THE PROVINCIAL POLICE, ACCORDING TO ONE OF THE STUDENTS.

17. (C) SEVERAL STUDENTS ADDED THAT, IN ADDITION TO LANGUAGE PROGRAMS, THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT HAS SENT REPRESENTATIVES INTO MINORITY COMMUNITIES TO LISTEN TO GRIEVANCES AND CALM PEOPLE DOWN. THESE STUDENTS ALSO SAID THEY NOTICED A REAL EFFORT ON THE PART OF PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS TO IDENTIFY AND FIND EMPLOYMENT FOR ETHNIC MINORITY UNIVERSITY GRADUATES. (TWO OF THE STUDENTS REMARKED THAT THEY HAD ALREADY COMPLETED THEIR OWN UNIVERSITY COURSES BUT CONTINUED TO TAKE CLASSES BECAUSE OF A LACK OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES, HOWEVER.)

THE STUDENTS SAY NO FORCED STERILIZATIONS

18. (C) REES'S FINAL QUESTION WAS ABOUT CONTINUING ALLEGATIONS THAT ETHNIC MINORITY WOMEN IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS ARE MADE TO UNDERGO ABORTIONS OR STERILIZATIONS AGAINST THEIR WILL. THE STUDENTS

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(INCLUDING ONE FEMALE STUDENT) REPLIED UNANIMOUSLY THAT THEY HAD NEVER HEARD OF ANYONE BEING SUBJECTED TO FORCED ABORTION OR STERILIZATION. THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT HAD A FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAM THAT ENCOURAGED PEOPLE TO USE IUDS OR OTHER METHODS OF BIRTH CONTROL, BUT THE STUDENTS DID NOT BELIEVE ANY COERCION WAS INVOLVED. IN A DISCUSSION AMONG THEMSELVES, ONE STUDENT SAID THERE MIGHT HAVE BEEN ISOLATED INCIDENTS IN THE PAST, BUT THE OTHERS DISAGREED.

119. (U) THE STAFFDEL DID NOT HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO
CLEAR THIS MESSAGE BEFORE DEPARTURE.

PORTER

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